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ABSTRACT

The counselor's role as an organizational change agent can be a catalytic force aimed at helping to create workplace wellness through psychological management of the change process. The Lewis and Lewis (1989) community counseling model provides helping professionals with guidelines to design comprehensive intervention strategies for assisting businesses and their employees with the transition process. The components of the model include: (1) direct client services such as individual and group counseling; (2) indirect client services such as client advocacy, consultation, and training; (3) direct community/organization services such as stress management training, career development and life planning workshops, transition awareness training, newsletters, and retraining; and (4) indirect community/organizational services focusing on the interface between the environment of the workplace and the employees working in that environment. The Employee Assistance Program counselor can work within the business and can also link with external resources to build organizational health, excellence, and productivity. Counselors are well positioned to assist with transition management from both an individual as well as a systems level. Counselor input and involvement can be a critical in ensuring productivity, business success, and workplace wellness. (Contains 29 references.) (ABL)

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A Developmentally Based Counseling Intervention Model For Managing Career Transitions

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Abstract

Businesses today face numerous new challenges as a result of the rising rate and complex nature of organizational transitions. These transitions are significantly affecting the psychology of employees. Counselors are in a pivotal position to assist with transition management on an individual and a systems level. This article presents a model that counselors can use to assist workers realize their potential professionally and personally.

A Developmentally Based Counseling Intervention Model For Managing Career Transitions

Shifting labor market dynamics are forcing organizations to adapt to new challenges related to work place transitions. Counselors are in a pivotal position to help orchestrate successful transition management by helping employees understand and respond to the variety of transition experiences which are occurring in the modern workplace. With this backdrop in mind, this article provides an overview of the types of changes businesses are facing, an understanding of how transition dynamics effect employees and organizations, and outlines a developmentally based counseling intervention model designed to promote work place wellness.

THE CHANGING WORK ENVIRONMENT

Changing societal trends have drastically affected the foundation and structure of the work environment. In the last decade businesses have experienced changes in a variety of areas. Demographic statistics point to shortages in entry level workers (Goldstein & Gilliam, 1990). An increasing number of elderly people, dual career families, as well as women and minorities entering the labor force have all influenced the work environment. Technological advancements have changed the rate of handling information, increased the quantity of innovations, shortened product life cycles, and enhanced productivity (Goldstein & Gilliam, 1990). Globalization of the market place has increased competition for resources as well as customers (Klineman, 1989;

Ulrich & Yeung, 1989). All of these changes have contributed to a rise in organizational transitions which workers confront on a more regular basis. These transitions range from small changes in the workplace to major ones such as mergers, acquisitions, and institutional downsizing. In general, organizational transitions are expected to continue during the next decade. In fact, a number of experts have noted that rapid, intense, unpredictable, and complex change in the business world is likely to characterize most work environments in the 1990s (Kimmerling, 1989; Ulrich & Yeung, 1989).

The recent rise of workplace transitions have had a significant and profound impact on the psychology of employees (Daniels, 1990). Employee adaptation to change is one of the biggest barriers to successful transition management. For example, when employees are required to leave the organization, such as during a period when layoffs or early retirements occur, it affects those who stay in the organization as well as those who may be asked to leave. In fact, research indicates that over half of all mergers and acquisitions have failed because employees are unable to psychologically adapt to transition (Morabito, 1989; Ulrich & Yeung, 1989).

In today's competitive global market place, successful transition management is becoming a fundamental reality of organizational survival, productivity, and excellence. The toll of increasing change in the workplace as well as society at large is having a staggering effect on the psychology of employees. It

calls to the forefront a need to respect and address the psychological impact of organizational transition on human development (Bridges, 1986; Daniels, 1990).

TRANSITION AND LOSS

Krupp (1987) notes that a period of transition is often characterized by a process of psychological disorientation and reorientation. It tends to alter a person's perceptions and may require changes in numerous personal assumptions and/or behaviors. Experiencing organizational transitions in one's career development has a range of effects such as the potential to catalyze personal growth or stimulate psychological deterioration. Although a number of theorists have used different terminology to describe the psychological impact of transition on human development they all note common patterns and themes (Bridges, 1980; Cumming & Cumming, 1966; Gould, 1978; Van Gennep, 1960). Krupp (1987) summarized three broad areas that these transition patterns can be categorized into: endings, neutral zones, and beginnings. During the ending phase, which may be spurred by being laid off, reassigned, or promoted, an employee must relinquish part of who they have been (i.e., a particular role, status within the organization) to accomplish a successful transition and incorporate the new changes (Bridges, 1986). In any transition, it is important to understand what one is giving up to fully embrace what is beginning (Bridges, 1986, Daniels, 1990). Often times individuals try to move quickly through the transition process without taking time to reflect on the experience which often includes losses as well as gains.

In contrast, the "neutral zone" refers to a time of uncertainty and questioning. It usually is characterized by feelings of emptiness or existential vacuum. Bridges (1980) describes this period as a process of internal reorientation when an individual feels unproductive, frustrated, and uncomfortable with their feelings. This sense of neutrality can become overwhelming as if one's sense of purpose, direction, or life plan may never become clear again. This stage presents an opportunity to think about all of the changes that are occurring and their potential impact. For example, it may provide a chance to examine a shift in one's identity and values. In today's society, time is rarely set aside to periodically evaluate or redefine who we are and where we are going. If one doesn't take advantage of the neutral zone period, their opportunity to examine and expand their view of life and its purpose may not be actualized (Bridges, 1980).

Experiences of personal loss can emerge out of a transition event. Whiting (1986) defines personal loss as an experience which "robs an individual of anything that is personally significant and/or familiar" (p.1). With this expanded definition in mind, it is suggested that a personal loss may be experienced in a variety of ways. It can emerge in response to a concrete life events such as those related to career (i.e., job termination, retirement, relocation, promotion), general life events (i.e., marriage, an expected death, divorce, birth, illness, aging) and crisis situations (i.e., environmental disaster, murder). Another type of loss can occur in the absence of an expected event, such as an

anticipated promotion which does not occur. Or a person may experience an abstract type of losses, for example the realization that their career ambitions and dreams may not be actualized (Whiting, 1986). Additionally, a sense of loss can result from the process of developmental maturation as an individual's way of conceptualizing his/her world or making sense of life experiences changes (Kegan, 1982).

Loss experiences are typically followed by the manifestation of various types grief reactions. Kubler-Ross (1969) delineated five predictable affective grief responses to personal loss that include: denial, anger, depression, bargaining, and acceptance. Raphael (1983) proposed a similar grieving paradigm comprised of three phases : (a) shock, numbness, and disbelief; (b) separation pain; and (c) psychological mourning.

Bowlby (1980) and Raphael (1983) examined the central role of attachment in loss situations and defined it in the context of human bonds. Deal (1985) has enlarged this concept beyond human attachment to include attachments to work and school settings, possessions, and pets. In the context of work, employees can become attached to many things. For example, work related roles can give an employee a sense of their status, power and identity. Other examples of worker attachments can include: employment responsibilities, company benefits (i.e., a car or access to club facilities) and a familiar and comfortable work routine. When these attachments are broken, such as in the case in workplace transitions, Deal (1985) suggests that many person's: "lose their

existential orientation and their will to go on" (p.303). This broadened view of attachment provides insight into the difficulties and grief responses that may emerge out of any type of workplace transition. Consequently, many of the major organizational changes that workers must adapt to have psychological and counseling implications.

ORGANIZATIONAL LOSS AND TRANSITION DYNAMICS

In recent years the psychological dynamics associated with loss, transition, grief, and attachment have been utilized to help understand the complex nature of change within organizations (Bridges, 1986; Daniels, 1990; Deal, 1985; Levinson, 1981; Schaef & Fassel, 1988). Organizations that fail to look at the psychological impact of change, often risk successfully achieving any type of major organizational change.

It is noted that, the impact of change often produces loss and grief responses in many employees, and if these reactions are not dealt with effectively they may negatively influence the whole organization (Bridges, 1986). People respond in a variety of ways when workplace attachments to roles, status, benefits, objects, or symbols, are broken. For instance, they may experience a sense of rejection, a loss of power and control, or feel a sense of void.

Organizational change can negatively effect an employees time and energy. Major disruptions in the work place may increase substance abuse, psychological problems, and illness. It is also thought to cut productivity up to fifty percent (Deal, 1985). Transition states can also produce ambiguous, stressful, and

emotionally laden situations. Such situations often lead to job dissatisfaction, absenteeism, squabbling, subtle undermining, and political in-fighting (Kanter, 1985).

Perhaps one of the most alarming examples of worker mal adjustment is the recent rise of work place assaults. In 1988 there were approximately thirty fatal work place assaults (Moore, 1989). These murders are not random incidence and they can potentially effect any business. They are often associated with intense anger and frustration as a result of failing to cope with transitions at the workplace. Less violent manifestations of these worker responses are employee theft, vandalism, and computer sabotage (Kanter, 1985).

In spite of an increasing amount of evidence pointing to the tremendous psychological impact of organizational change on workers, Scott and Jaffe (1988) note that companies are reluctant to recognize the needs of their employees during times of transition. Levinson (1981) supports this notion by stressing that business executives don't understand the powerful impact of transition on employees. Adams and Spencer (1988), Levinson (1981), and Bridges (1986) agree that organizations have been more successful at managing change from a systems perspective, however, many businesses continue to fall short of helping employees manage transition on a psychological level.

Businesses often misunderstand the impact of change on employees and expect them to quickly return to pre-transition performance rates. Workforce transitions can be compounded by

additional losses in an individual's personal life which can further detract from optimal productivity. In the future, counseling strategies and interventions need to be designed to assist employees through the difficulties of transition. Counselors can play an important role at all levels of the organization by making the transition process manageable, acceptable, transforming, and catalatic.

THE ROLE OF THE COUNSELOR

As a result of the changing demographic and labor market demands the impact of organizational transitions on employees need to be addressed. Currently, counseling services in business and industry are commonly associated with employee assistance programs (EAP). However, as Hollmann (1981) points out, EAPs tend to focus on treatment and counseling services rather than addressing a comprehensive service approach including prevention, consultation, advocacy, and education. Workplace upheaval caused by transition provides counselors with an opportunity to successfully impact individual employees as well as the whole organization by initiating prevention and interventions efforts that are characterized by employee advocacy, organizational consultation and education services. As suggested by the statistics reported on the failure rate of mergers and acquisitions, counselors are not being used effectively to manage the human side of change in most work environments where transitions occur.

In short, it is suggested that the counselor's role as an organizational change agent can be a catalytic force aimed at

helping to create workplace wellness through psychological management of the change process. However, to do so, the counselor's expertise needs to be utilized for individual/group counseling and it should also be used to serve the total organization by developing system-wide interventions aimed at successful transition management. The role of the counselor in workplace transitions can be creative, innovative and approach helping from both a prevention and intervention stance.

The Lewis and Lewis (1989) community counseling model provides helping professionals with guidelines to design comprehensive intervention strategies for assisting business and their employees with the transition process. This model is built on a set of four assumptions that are listed below.

1. A person's environment can be either nurturing or debilitating.
2. A multifaceted service approach to promote human potential is more efficient than a single focus approach.
3. Prevention is more efficient than remediation.
4. The community counseling model can be applied in a variety of helping settings (Lewis & Lewis, 1989).

According to D'Andrea (1984), counselors should become architects who design and orchestrate the counseling experience to maximize the client's opportunity to develop through a variety of approaches. The community counseling approach is a four factor model which can be adapted by counselors to address organizational change and its impact on employees. The four facets are: 1) direct

client service, 2) indirect client service, 3) direct community service, 4) indirect community service. Lewis and Lewis (1989) point out that all of the components must be utilized in order to effectively stimulate human growth and development.

The first component of the model, direct client service, is a kin to the more traditional approach of EAP programs which are aimed directly at serving the employee/client. These include the provision of individual/group counseling and outreach services to at-risk employees. Short-term individual and group counseling for loss/transition resolution provide an important option for employees having difficulty coping with career, organizational and/or personal transitions. Since loss does not occur in a vacuum, it is important to assess the impact of both work and personal transitions which may be simultaneously occurring in an employees life. When an employee needs a more extensive intervention services than the EAP counselor can provide, then referral for additional help become an important auxiliary component to direct client services.

The second area for counselor intervention is indirect client services. These types of human services include client advocacy, consultation and training. Employees in supervisory positions in concert with counselors can play a pivotal role in the use of community/organizational counseling services. These supervisors need to be able to know what services are available for their employees as well as how they can help their employees to link up with these services. Counselors can train supervisors to recognize

employee problems, confront issues, and make referrals. This will help make the organization more responsive to employee needs (Lewis & Lewis, 1989). If it is assessed that an employee requires additional services that go beyond what the company can provide, then the counselor can refer them to available community services. In this capacity counselors can serve as an advocate and a consultant to make sure that these systems optimally work for employees.

The third component of the model is direct community/organization services. The counselors role in this capacity is to implement programs based on community education models (Lewis & Lewis, 1989). When an organization is going through transition these programs need to be aimed at early intervention concerns. The counselor is responsible for orchestrating comprehensive transition services for employee groups. These services might involve meeting with employee groups such as work teams to address concerns, feelings, needs, and interests related to the upcoming organizational changes. Examples of these types of employee programs, intervention strategies and services that counselors may provide during transition times are: stress management training; career development and life planning workshops; transition awareness training; periodic newsletters to keep employees up to date on changes; survivor re-commitment workshops; downsizing support services for those leaving; informational meetings about organizational restructuring, policy changes and new work assignments; and retraining for new technical

skills which include an orientation to the psychological issues related to change.

Research shows that social support is an important variable that buffers individuals from the debilitating effects of personal transitions which may arise during adulthood (Daniels, 1990; Pearson, 1986). The counselor can help employees in this regard by initiating and implementing supportive services and self help groups. Support networks in business settings can take many forms and it is important to have a range of options which address a variety of employee needs (Daniels, 1990). Some examples of support services are: transition support groups, transition monitoring teams, pre-retirement groups, downsizing support services, and informal social gatherings or retreats. Interestingly, findings in this area (Daniels, 1990) suggests that females tend to experience a higher degree of support from others than men. The awareness that this gender difference may exist, suggest that counselors may need to offer a range of support services (Daniels, 1990).

The fourth segment of the model is indirect community/organizational services. This component focuses on the interface between the environment of the workplace and its employees. In this respect, the counselors role is to intervene in reducing stressors in the work environment and to address changes in organizational climate and culture.

Organizational culture may dramatically change with significant transitions and often employees feel the effect. As

Deal (1985) points out, employees often experience a grief reaction when an organizations' culture changes. Therefore, it is important for counselors to be aware of potential grief reactions and intervene when necessary.

Mergers are a good example of how organizational culture may change. In this type of situation the way one organization has "always done things" is bound to be different than the traditional operating standards of the other organization. Thus, counselors may need to help employees adapt to and expand their awareness of how the two sets of employees and cultures will blend together and be managed. Counselors can assist employees with any potential resistance to change as well as any feelings of loss and grief. Employees can feel sad or resist changes such as a new company name or changes in customs, norms, and traditions. Once employees feelings are dealt with then the counselor can provide them with workshops to introduce new cultural norms, explain how these changes will concretely effect the organization and their position in it, and help them solidify their investment in the new emerging organizational culture.

As Schein (1990) points out many organizational change efforts have failed because they failed to recognize the cultural forces and how they impact on human resources. Counselors have the knowledge, skills, and expertise to play a crucial role in addressing the human and psychological factors of change. They can work in concert with management to identify deficiencies and help develop strategies for remediation based on the four components of

the Lewis and Lewis (1989) model.

CONCLUSION

The Lewis and Lewis (1989) community/organization counseling model is a comprehensive approach which focuses on the individual, the environment, and the interaction between the two. It provides counselors in an organizational setting with a map to guide their efforts for transition management. This model in conjunction with an understanding of the impact of transitions on the psychology of employees, provide counselors with the vital information to design necessary interventions.

Counselors can potentially play a catalytic role in promoting workplace wellness during a decade of widespread social, economic and organizational change. The EAP counselor can work within the business as well as link with external resources to build organizational health, excellence, and productivity. As Bridges (1986) has noted, its not just good business to deal with the human side of change, but organizations are ethically responsible to help people through difficult professional and personal times during their career development. In short, it is emphasized that counselors are well positioned to assist with transition management from both an individual as well as a systems level. Their input and involvement can be a critical in ensuring productivity, business success, and work place wellness.

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